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ABSTRACT

This module on the leisure operation is intended to enable the reader to develop an understanding of the special requirements and priorities in the development and management of a leisure operation. The material is presented in a self-instructional format in four sections. At the beginning of each section is a statement of the objectives that will be achieved as a result of working through the material that follows. Users of the module are asked to relate information given in the text to their own experience and knowledge. Where appropriate, suggested solutions to these questions are given on the opposite or following page. The four sections cover these topics: (1) evaluating the leisure opportunities; (2) developing leisure facilities; (3) preparing an operational plan; and (4) satisfying the leisure customer. (YLB)

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OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Leisure Management
MODULE

THE LEISURE OPERATION

OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This self-study unit has been written by Gerry Carver. The case studies in Sections 3 and 4 are from material prepared by Marjorie Wright and her colleagues at Bournemouth Polytechnic (previously Dorset Institute of Higher Education).

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THE LEISURE OPERATION

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HOW TO USE THIS UNIT

The operational and management principles underlying a successful leisure operation are consistent with good practice in hotel and catering management generally. This self-study unit enables the reader to develop an understanding of the special requirements and priorities in the development and management of a leisure operation.

The Leisure Operation embraces four key elements – evaluation, development, operation and customer satisfaction. Each of the four sections seeks to inform and advise on important aspects of leisure management, while providing opportunities to apply existing and new knowledge to practical examples.

At the start of each section is a statement of the objectives you will be able to achieve by working through the material that follows.

From time to time you will be asked to relate information given in the text to your own experience and knowledge. Space is provided below these activities for you to write your answers. Where appropriate, suggested solutions to the questions are given on the next page.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades there has been an enormous growth in the leisure industry. Increased investment and choice in leisure has largely matched the overall increase in leisure time and disposable income. The pace of this change has been considerable and has transformed people's life-styles. The various elements of leisure, tourism, hotel, catering and retail have also been drawn more closely together.

The hotel or catering manager or supervisor can now expect to be working alongside a leisure operation at some stage of his or her career, if not taking some direct responsibility.

SECTION 1
Evaluating the leisure opportunities

After completing this section you will be able to:

- give examples of the wide range of leisure facilities which can be associated with hotel and catering activity
- list the benefits of investing in leisure facilities
- describe the key steps in a leisure feasibility study
- explain some alternative management options for leisure operations.

HOTEL, CATERING AND LEISURE FACILITIES

There has been an enormous growth in the range and sophistication of leisure pursuits in the last 20 years.

The sport of windsurfing provides a good example. Every seafront and recreational lake now sports the colourful sails that go with this popular activity. Increased disposable income and greater mobility by car have combined with an interest in fitness and health, and advances in sailboard production technology. The sport is now within the grasp of many thousands of enthusiasts and readily available to beginners.

As this growth in leisure activities has accelerated, the hotel and catering industry has been drawn more closely to leisure provision. There is a vast range of leisure facilities and activities which can be associated directly or indirectly with hotel and catering operations.

In the space below, list four types of establishment – as different as possible from each other – that you know of in your town, county or region and which combine leisure facilities with catering and/or hotel facilities. Describe briefly the leisure provision, and the hotel and catering link.

ESTABLISHMENT	*LEISURE PROVISION*	*HOTEL AND CATERING LINK*

THE LEISURE OPERATION

The following examples illustrate the increasing range of establishments in which leisure and hotel and catering operations are combined.

ESTABLISHMENT	LEISURE PROVISION	HOTEL AND CATERING LINK
Butlin's Southcoast World, Bognor Regis	Aquasplash leisure pool & flume rides, table tennis, bowls snooker, badminton fitness gymnasium outdoor fun pool	Residential holiday centre also attracting day visitors, restaurant service as well as food court and evening entertainment with bars and catering
The Spa Hotel, Tunbridge Wells, Kent	Sparkling Health health and leisure centre. • spa & swimming pools • fitness gymnasium • aerobics room • saunas & sunbeds • floodlit tennis • fitness trail • games room • adventure playground Available to residents – and to non-residents by membership	Privately owned 75 bedroom hotel: bars, restaurant, conference and banqueting facilities
Crowtree Leisure Centre, Sunderland Borough Council	Europe's largest public leisure centre • ice rink • leisure pool • sports hall • squash courts • bowls hall • fitness gymnasium	• banqueting suite & bar • vending • self-service restaurant • ice rink servery • Crowtree Bar • Teens Bar • seminar suite
Goodwood Park Country Club Hotel, West Sussex	• 18 hole golf course • swimming & spa pools • sauna, steam room • snooker, tennis • fitness gymnasium	90 bedroom hotel with Waterbeach Grill & Bar
Barnsdale Country Club, Rutland Water, Leicestershire	Country Club membership provides access to many leisure activities including • swimming & spa pools • gymnasium, golf • sauna & sunbeds • squash courts • tennis & bowls • windsurfing & water-skiing • clay pigeon shooting	Private hotel rooms for members and guests, restaurant and bars, conference and party facilities
Norwich Sports Village	Sports Village facilities: • sports hall • indoor tennis arena • squash courts • health & fitness centre • aerobic studio • saunas, solarium, whirlpool • waterpark Open to residents and non-residents: pay as you play - no membership	3-star, 56 bedroom hotel, á la carte restaurant, bistro and bar, conferences and exhibitions (arena); jointly owned – Broadland District Council and IHS Sport Villages
Centre Parcs, Nottingham and Elvedon	Leisure pool is central feature with heated outdoor extension plus: • sports hall • squash courts • table tennis • cycling	Residential holiday centre offering sports and leisure activities as an integral part of holiday or short break. Restaurants, bars

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With this background, imagine you own an 80 bedroom hotel on the outskirts of a large town. You have available up to 25 acres of land adjacent to your hotel and you are considering investing in new leisure facilities. Under the appropriate heading below list a total of 12 different facilities (your list can include any mix of indoor and outdoor activities) to which you might give MOST *consideration.*

INDOOR PROVISION *OUTDOOR FACILITY/ACTIVITY*

THE LEISURE OPERATION

As the selection of industry examples shows, leisure provision will vary considerably according to the overall type of business operation.

Probably the most common leisure facilities associated with hotels and catering are swimming pools, health and fitness suites (gymnasia, sunbeds, saunas, whirlpools, Jacuzzi, beauty therapy), tennis courts and golf courses. In addition, there are numerous leisure activities for which provision may be made in conjunction with hotel and catering operations.

The following schedule summarises the principal possibilities for a 25 acre site adjacent to an hotel. All these activities are associated with accommodation or catering services at one establishment or another in the UK. In some cases only one facility could fit the site. In others a combination would be possible.

INDOOR	OUTDOOR
Swimming pool/water slide	Par 3, 9 hole golf course
Spa pool	Golf driving range
Sauna/solaria	Golf practice net
Whirlpool/Jacuzzi	Trim trail
Steam room	Canoeing, rowing
Aerobics/dance studio	Swimming pool/waterslide
Squash courts	Tennis court(s)
Fitness gymnasium	Putting green
Beauty parlour	Cycling
Sports hall	Rifle range
(badminton, volley ball,	Archery
netball, basketball)	Ski slope
Indoor bowls hall	Croquet lawn
Snooker/pool	Bowls green
Table tennis	Fishing
Bowling alley	Playground

In preparing your list did you have in mind:

- **the needs of the market**
- **spatial requirements for land**
- **likely scale of investment**
- **how the facilities would fit with a hotel**
- **the local competition?**

Of course there are also many other things to consider in making a choice; you will consider these later in this section.

SPACE REQUIRED FOR LEISURE

It can be difficult to judge just how much space is needed for certain types of leisure provision. The requirements for recreational activities can vary greatly from those for competitive activities. The needs of a hotel, even with a non-resident membership scheme are likely to differ greatly from municipal provision.

The following table provides a useful set of yardsticks for recreational facilities.

FACILITY	MINIMUM SIZE (APPROXIMATE)
Fitness gymnasium	45 sq m
Aerobics hall	12 m x 15 m (for a class of 25)
Swimming pool	10 m x 5 m
Spa pool	4 m x 4 m
Sauna	4 m x 4 m
Sunbed	3 m x 2 m
Badminton	15 m x 7 m (height 6.5 m)
Health and fitness suite	800 sq m - 1000 sq m incorporating pool, spa, sunbed, sauna, aerobics hall and fitness suite
Golf centre	200 - 250 acres
18-hole golf course	100 - 160 acres
9-hole par 3	10 - 15 acres
9-hole pitch and putt	4 acres
Driving range	8 - 12 acres
Trim trail	0.5 km to 3 km in length
Tennis courts x 2	25 m x 35m (0.25 acre) (with floodlights)
Clay pigeon shooting	ideal minimum 80 acres (safety range of a shot gun is about 350 yards).
Bowls green (6 rinks)	45 m x 45 m

Having considered the list of potential facilities and the space required, draw a sketch layout plan of the combination of leisure facilities (indoor and/or outdoor) you would prefer to develop on your 25 acre site. Remember your hotel has 80 bedrooms. For this particular exercise you can presume sufficient finance is available for your ideas!

Now list the facilities you have included on your sketch, and the main reason for each.

FACILITY	*MAIN REASON FOR INCLUSION*

BENEFITS OF LEISURE FACILITIES

The benefits of leisure facilities can be examined from two points of view:

- by identifying potential benefits to the individual hotel resident, member or visitor to the establishment concerned (this was covered in greater depth in *The Leisure Experience*)
- by recognising the likely benefits to the business which invests in, or becomes linked to, such facilities.

Consider these two points of view, and list below at least four benefits in each category which you think are important.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO INDIVIDUAL USING LEISURE FACILITIES

LIKELY BENEFITS TO HOTEL OR CATERING OPERATION OF ON-SITE LINK WITH LEISURE FACILITIES

Personal benefits to the customer include:

- enjoyment and satisfaction
- reduction of stress
- enhanced visit or stay
- social interaction
- improved health and fitness
- acquisition of new skills
- increased self-esteem
- involving family participation
- pleasure at seeing others participate
- better value for money.

The benefits to a business of providing leisure facilities may include:

- increased hotel occupancy
- higher value room rates
- increased bar and catering turnover
- additional profit centre
- return on investment
- return on land utilisation
- better local profile through leisure membership scheme
- adds competitive edge in a changing market
- attraction of high spending visitors
- widens family appeal
- updates the image of a hotel or catering operation
- attracting conference and seminar trade.

LEISURE FEASIBILITY STUDY

It is important to appreciate the very many potential links between hotel or catering facilities and leisure operations.

You may already work in an establishment linked with leisure facilities, or may take up such a post in the future. At some stage you may have the opportunity to contribute to the planning and decision-making processes for providing leisure facilities.

In keeping with good business practice, it is essential that a full evaluation of a potential leisure project is undertaken. Unfortunately when it comes to leisure, the best of business people occasionally let their personal enthusiasm for leisure override their otherwise sound business philosophy! Leisure investment does not come cheaply. An analysis of hotel investments in leisure over a three year period highlighted a trend towards sophisticated but less elaborate, low-maintenance schemes. However the average investment per hotel was in the region of £500,000, though the range was from £75,000 to £2.5 million.

There are three essential ingredients for success in any new leisure investment:

- a good business idea
- sound appraisal and projections
- the right people to turn the idea to success.

A feasibility study is therefore an early and essential step in leisure business planning once a good idea has germinated. It may be necessary to seek the professional assistance of a leisure consultant in undertaking the feasibility study.

If you were asked what leisure facilities could be added to a 50 bedroom hotel, what would be the main factors that should be considered in the feasibility study? List them below.

FRAMEWORK FOR A LEISURE FEASIBILITY STUDY

A feasibility study for the provision of leisure facilities should address the following key issues:

Objectives

Define the objectives which lie behind your leisure ideas.

- Is your main objective to establish a profit centre?
- Would the leisure provision form part of upgrading your establishment?
- Are the leisure facilities to be a lure for better business?
- Is the leisure provision solely for residents?

Decide what other questions need to be answered.

Constraints and opportunities

Assess the main constraints and opportunities.

- Obtain existing site and building plans.
- Define acreage.
- Tour leisure facilities at similar and different establishments.
- Identify potential and limitations of any existing land or buildings to be used (including planning permission).
- Make an inventory of existing local leisure facilities.

Initial options

List the leisure facilities which initially seem to offer the most practical options.

- Which categories of leisure provision are most suited to your objectives?
- List the various facilities which are options in each category.
- Gather any available local data and undertake some market research on which to base any assessment.
- Identify the likely capital and revenue costs for each type of provision.
- Consider the markets and benefits of each type of provision.

Selection of best option

Decide against your business criteria which if any leisure investment seems to justify itself.

- Be careful about the 'mix' of facilities you choose.
- Take professional advice before selection if you are unsure.
- Refine the capital and revenue appraisal of your selection.
- Confirm nature and volume of likely use.

Marketing philosophy

Establish the main marketing thrust of the scheme.

- Choose one word to lead the philosophy – it may be fitness, fun, family, life-style, luxury or another.
- Develop the overall image concept you wish to portray.

(This is covered in greater depth in *Promoting Leisure*.)

Design influences

Consider the principal operational and marketing influences on the design of the leisure provision.

- Is the provision to be built separate to, or integrated with the existing establishment?
- Is the leisure service to be for residents or clients or will it also be available to others by membership or admission payment?
- Does the quality of provision have to match, or surpass existing standards in the establishment or in the local market-place?
- Take account of anticipated nature and volume of use.

Sketch plan layout

Prepare an initial architect's sketch proposal of your selected scheme.

- Highlight the architectural concept proposed.
- Provide the general layout suggested.
- Detail the specific aspects of leisure provision and their inter-relationship.
- Indicate services and circulation and changing space.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS FOR LEISURE OPERATIONS

Many of the management principles which apply to hotel and catering apply equally to leisure. However, there are also many special considerations for the management and operation of leisure facilities. To overlook these can prove very costly.

The differences were emphasised when Trusthouse Forte invested in hotel health and fitness suites. THF decided not to manage the facilities directly themselves because their hotel management did not have suitable experience.

THF contracted Fitness For Industry to take control because they could offer the necessary technical and management expertise and achieve the standards of service required. Much later THF took a controlling interest in FFI.

The majority of hotels which have invested in leisure facilities have managed the operations themselves. In most cases this has been successful, but for a few, inexperience and naivety in leisure has been costly.

Note below what you would see as the advantages, and the disadvantages of the various management options available for the development and management of leisure facilities which would be available to hotel guests and members.

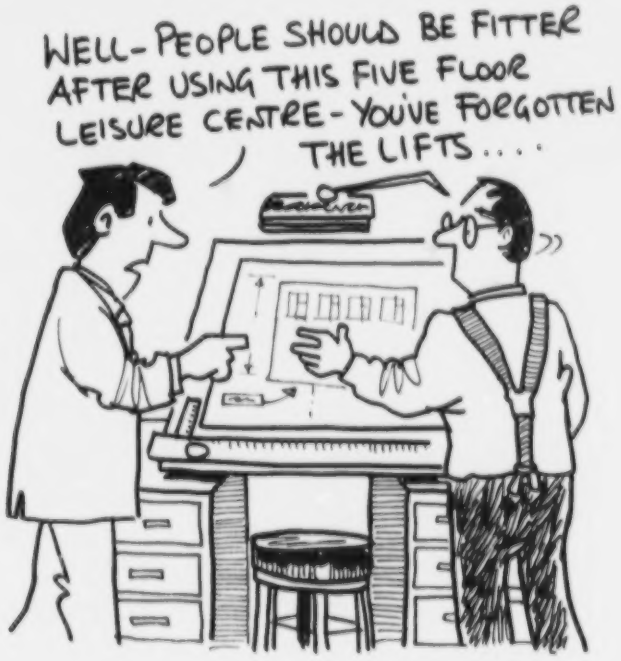
MANAGEMENT OPTION	*ADVANTAGES*	*DISADVANTAGES*
Self-fund and operate		
External investment and management		
External management		
Joint venture		
Specialist franchise		

Your answer may have included the following.

MANAGEMENT OPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Self-fund and operate		
Direct management by existing hotel staff	Ensures consistency with existing management style and practices	Management and staff unlikely to have essential skills and fully appreciate leisure customer's needs
Direct management but with staff recruited with experience in leisure under leisure 'manager'	Much increased chance of a good leisure service yet with direct management control retained	Probably involves more staff costs so appropriate income or other benefits must be achieved
External investment and management		
Arrangement made for external firm to provide and manage facilities independently	Much less common arrangement but can work where provision is required as extra for a hotel but capital not available or leisure venture not appealing	Requires careful planning and control especially for hotel usage rights and there are more potential difficulties about quality in the long term
External management		
Investment, ownership and overall control retained but specialist firm retained under contract to manage	Main elements of control retained and expertise in leisure management, promotion and service acquired. Can follow good franchise practice	Probably reduces profitability to owners and does not always give chance for best quality control or action
Joint venture		
Applied to specific facility or equipment, ownership of shell retained but external investment in equipment with profit share or rental	Decreases financial risk and level of investment and introduces some specialist development expertise	Reduces long-term profitability and flexibility
Specialist franchise		
Can be used for beauty therapy service for example with room/space rented	Can provide extra high quality adjunct to service at low risk	Risk of poor operator, may reduce long-term flexibility and income

If the conclusion of the feasibility study is favourable, the next stage is to plan in more detail what leisure facilities will be developed. This is the subject of the next section.

SECTION 2
Developing leisure facilities



After completing this section you will be able to:

- describe what should be covered in a business plan, and how the plan should be presented
- draft a client brief for the development of new leisure facilities
- outline what is involved in the design phase of development, and in liaising with statutory and other authorities
- state the features of a good pre-opening plan for leisure facilities.

PREPARING A BUSINESS PLAN

Once the opportunities for providing leisure facilities have been evaluated – that is to say:

- the costs and benefits have been considered
- an appropriate feasibility study has been undertaken
- the alternative management arrangements have been assessed

the time will have arrived to make the case for specific investment. The evaluation work will have provided a wealth of information. Original ideas may have been challenged, or thwarted. New ideas may have developed. Now is the time to prepare a business plan if there is a scheme which seems sound.

The main ingredients of the business plan will be:

- Clear objectives for any leisure development. For example: develop a swimming pool to increase the overall attraction of the hotel and increase room occupancy.
- Summary details of the proposed leisure provision.
- A definition of the market to be served and the likely impact.
- Capital and revenue financial projections.
- A summary of how the facilities will be managed and operated.

The business plan can be the basis for seeking financial support from an investor, the justification for leisure investment presented to a hotel proprietor or manager, or simply the means by which an investor or proprietor justifies a scheme to himself or herself.

Now consider how you might present a business plan to your managing director (or other appropriate senior management) for the provision of a new leisure facility (or leisure facilities) at your establishment. Under each of the headings on the opposite page, list three items which your plan should cover.

FACILITIES

MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

FINANCE

THE LEISURE OPERATION

The following are some of the appropriate items to include in a leisure business plan.

FACILITIES

- Details of facilities proposed including any feasibility plans or sketches available, together with estimated costs of various elements.
- A description of the performance of any existing leisure facilities. If the business plan is to be presented to an external company or investor, it would be necessary to provide information on the reputation, organisation and performance of the entire holiday centre.
- Annual running costs – maintenance (contractual and routine), chemicals, cleaning, and so forth.
- Likely costs and timescale for refurbishment of various elements.

MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

- Any comparisons with:
  other holiday centres
  other similar health and fitness suites.
- Specific information on national/regional/local leisure market and potential users and likely growth.
- Importance of membership scheme for non-residents.
- Existing management and personnel strengths which can be employed in the new venture. Staff implications of new development.
- Suggested opening, programming and pricing framework.
- Possible seasonal demands patterns.
- Summary of likely nature of marketing activity for new leisure facilities.

FINANCE

- Estimated investment costs with any alternative or optional elements.
- Trading forecast for new facilities. If free use by holiday centre residents is involved, a 'fee' for use could be agreed to enable cost centre accounting for the leisure facilities.
- For an outside company or investor, include balance sheets for the whole business for the past three years.
- If the scheme represents an extension of leisure facilities, it is important to project any improvement or worsening in the financial performance of these existing facilities.
- Indicate in general terms, if appropriate, potential sources of finance under consideration.
- Indicate any other financial options available including leasing, rental or shared profit arrangements.

Guidelines for presentation of a business plan

1. The presentation format of the business plan should set the tone – have the plan typed and neatly presented.
2. Do not put too much information on each page, put the bulk of the data in an appendix and put a one-page summary of the plan in list form at the beginning of the document.
3. Remember you are presenting an idea which must have been adequately researched, and have your full support and commitment.
4. The objectives of the leisure investment must be clearly stated.
5. The plan must be prepared with the person who is to consider the report in mind, for instance, potential investor, holiday camp director, hotel proprietor or hotel manager or immediate superior.
6. Ensure full use is made of relevant information gained from any research or feasibility work and include this in the appendix.
7. Keep the written plan reasonably brief. Use short rather than long sentences, and ensure each one provides new information, or expands on previous statements. All the main points must be very clearly expressed, and key statistics and financial information highlighted.
8. Within the plan demonstrate that you fully understand the leisure market.
9. Ideally arrange to present your plan in person. This provides you with the opportunity to emphasise all the main points, and helps ensure as much notice as possible is taken of the plans.

THE CLIENT BRIEF

Once the feasibility of a leisure project has been established, a business plan developed and adequate financial arrangements made, a client brief should be prepared for the architects and designers.

The client brief is the essential bridge between what you set out to achieve and the eventual outcome. It's main purpose is to present to the architect or designer a flexible working statement of the client's requirements.

> The absence of a clear client brief often leads to the provision of leisure facilities which regrettably do not achieve their intended goals. Often the design, quality, or even the facilities themselves, do not turn out to be what the client really had in mind.

The brief will outline the concept of the leisure facilities you wish to develop, and provide details about the leisure facilities you wish to include.

Just how you tackle the client brief depends on the particular circumstances of the proposed leisure development. Often, if an architect has been selected, a partnership approach can be adopted to develop the brief, drawing upon the expertise and wishes of both client and designer.

For certain larger projects it may be wise to involve independent help for the preparation of the brief – especially if you have already had an independent feasibility study. In other circumstances the client may be able to prepare a sound brief and use this in the process of selecting a suitable architect.

While the brief should become a written document, the discussions and compromises along the way are an important part of the process.

The client brief has two important elements – the concept and the preferred details.

The concept will indicate:

- likely limitations of capital finance
- the scale of the project
- the location and area of land available
- what new or existing buildings or facilities are to be included
- the nature and quality of facilities to be developed
- types of user anticipated
- any general design theme to be adopted
- general management and staffing intentions.

The detail may include:

- specific types or sizes of facility required
- range of activities proposed
- preferred finishes (tiling, decor, and so forth)
- required linking with existing building/facilities
- food and beverage facilities to be added
- reception/booking provision
- changing room requirements
- selected equipment (type and range).

Under the headings provided on the next two pages (or your own, more appropriate headings) indicate, in note form, the sort of comments you might include in a client brief for the provision of a new leisure facility (facilities) at your establishment.

MAIN CONCEPT

Buildings – new or existing to be included

Facilities to be included – nature and quality

General design theme

Management approach to be adopted

DESIGN DETAIL

Specific facilities required – type/size

Food and beverage service

Reception/booking provision

Changing room requirements

Specialised equipment to be installed

THE DESIGN PROCESS

Once the client brief has been prepared, the design phase of the leisure development is under way.

Just how the project develops from this point depends on its size and nature. An architect may have been commissioned and the client might be managing the project, liaising with the architect and in due course going to tender for the building work. In other cases a project management approach may be adopted with a single firm providing and co-ordinating the entire technical service from design to management of the construction.

The architect or designer should respond to the client brief with sketch proposals which show some alternatives.

PLANNING PERMISSION

By this stage some thought will have been given to the question of planning permission. Indeed, fundamental issues with regard to such permission will have been considered in any feasibility study.

Planning permission is generally necessary when 'development' is proposed. 'Development' normally means the control of buildings and land including the erection of new business premises, the 'change of use' of buildings and land, or alterations which materially affect existing buildings. Planning applications are submitted to the planning department of the local district council and both they and the county council have an interest in the planning process.

The checklist opposite provides some useful indicators concerning planning permission – some of which come into play once the architect starts to develop plans.

Getting planning permission

1. An early view should be sought from the planning department on the likelihood of permission. County structure and local plans provide an existing framework.
2. At the appropriate time, informal meetings should be held with planning officers to discuss important elements such as design criteria, parking and highway aspects and landscaping.
3. It is important to understand the local authority process by which permission is granted and know when best to submit the application to meet the Council's Planning Committee timetable. The statutory period by which a decision should be received, is eight weeks, but this can be extended in some circumstances.
4. Liaise with neighbours regarding your intentions. While this may seem to encourage objections, it gives you the chance to counteract them at an early stage, and to submit plans which take them into account as far as possible.
5. Seek advice as to whether it would be advantageous to first seek outline permission, or to solely submit an application for full planning permission once the detailed design is completed.
6. In most circumstances, professional advice from architects, and possibly planning consultants, is extremely advantageous in successfully negotiating the planning process.
7. If an application is for the first stage of a development, information must also be submitted about the rest of the scheme.
8. The requirements with regard to the application are very specific and it is essential that various fees, certificates and copies of plans are submitted accordingly.

Close liaison should be maintained with the architect in the development of the detailed design. His or her expertise will provide solutions to meet your objectives. However, it is very important to check that the final detailed design measures up to your overall objectives and the leisure facilities can generate the anticipated income levels and provide the atmosphere you require.

At various stages it may also be important, depending on your project, to consult:

- your solicitor regarding the deeds of the property
- the environmental health officer
- building control officer regarding Building Regulations approval (also in the planning department)
- the local fire authority
- the clerk to the licensing magistrates
- and, in the case of certain leisure facilities, the ambulance service.

A PRE-OPENING PLAN

So much attention is paid to the design and construction elements of leisure provision, that often the careful planning in preparation for opening the leisure facilities receives less attention than it should.

A pre-opening plan should cover three, if not six months prior to opening, and should deal with all the important aspects of recruitment, training, equipment and furnishing, promotion and publicity and the general style of operation.

The checklist opposite cover the features of a good pre-opening plan.

Preparing a pre-opening plan

1. At the outset, a clear timetable should be set on a week-by-week basis for the various tasks that need to be completed. Review that timetable each week and adjust accordingly. Certain tasks may not be possible until others have been completed and lack of persistence can often leave too much to be done in the last few weeks!
2. Establish the staffing requirements, decide how many new staff are required and how many existing staff could play a role in the leisure facilities. Advertise earlier rather than later, as you can always delay appointments.
3. Recognise that training and preparing to open takes time. If you can arrange it, have two or three weeks with key staff before opening – it can pay great dividends. Plan the training with a clear timetable so the staff have a sense of purpose and direction. It is essential that evacuation, fire and other emergency and safety procedures are agreed and practised before opening to guests or members.
4. If you are to equip facilities, gather brochures and information at an early stage. Arrange for key representatives to call on you at a convenient time. Ask about their recent clients to whom you can talk. Get specialist advice if you are unsure and involve any key staff in the process. Check carefully on delivery times against your projected opening date. Plan for the building to be ready for the equipment – and the equipment to be installed at least a fortnight before you open.
5. Have an opening date in mind. It is your target to work to. However, be careful about publicising a date too soon because the uncertainty of construction work and potential snags could cause embarrassment. It is often best to give a cautious estimate, for example early October even if you have hopes of late September, then confirm the date nearer the time when you are confident it can be achieved.
6. Preliminary publicity should start as soon as the leisure project is confirmed and should initiate a steady, developing programme. If the leisure project represents a 're-positioning' of a hotel in the market-place or an additional business aim, the promotion cannot be left until the facilities are ready to open. Arrange topping out and opening ceremonies to gain extra publicity and thank those who have helped.
7. Ensure licence applications are submitted in good time. Consultations may first be necessary.
8. Establish a good rapport with the local press and people, especially if local trade is an important element of the leisure activity. Invite people to view the facilities once they are completed, but shortly before opening. 'Open evenings' can be very helpful for club membership.

Attention to detail and keeping to a reasonable timetable can ensure that the leisure operation opens ready to properly serve guests and members, with staff confident in their work.

Draw up a list of the most important actions you would take over the six months preceding the opening of a new leisure facility (facilities) at your establishment, to ensure a first class service is provided from the outset.

Month 1

Month 2

Month 3

Month 4

Month 5

Month 6, Opening

The diagram below shows the complete leisure development process that might apply to a large project.

Depending on the size and nature of the leisure development, not all of the elements in the diagram would apply. However it does trace a logical path which provides a useful yardstick for any project, and which should help relate what has been covered so far in this self-study unit with the next two sections, *Preparing an operational plan* and *Satisfying the leisure customer*.

SECTION 3
Preparing an operational plan

After completing this section you will be able to:

- state the essential health and safety requirements for a leisure operation
- draw up safe operating procedures for leisure facilities and equipment
- identify the staff skills and training necessary to operate particular leisure facilities
- review existing standards and, where appropriate, develop a framework of good practice and etiquette for the use of leisure facilities.

OPERATING SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES

Operating systems and procedures for leisure facilities should revolve around a number of key priorities which can be summarised as:

- health and safety
- customer service and satisfaction
- staff commitment and teamwork
- hygiene and personal health
- control and economy of operation
- adaptability.

Experience in the past few years has highlighted that leisure facilities developed in association with hotel or catering provision can fail substantially if proprietors and managers do not give sufficient priority to the manner in which the leisure facilities are operated.

> Paul Kelly, head of marketing of L & R Leisure, said at the 1990 annual conference of developing property for the hotel and leisure industry:
>
> "In general terms hotel leisure centres are pretty poor. Many have poor hygiene standards particularly in respect of swimming pools. Very few have coherent fitness programmes. There is often a tension between the needs of hotel residents and the use of facilities by non-residents.
>
> "Very few are real profit centres in their own right. The proliferation of leisure centres that has taken place in the last few years has been marketing rather than market driven. The development of a leisure centre is often used to support the hotel tariff and is turned into a marketing benefit.
>
> "Research shows that well over 50% of people booking hotel accommodation are motivated to do so if leisure facilities are part of the package. Yet fewer than one in ten then go on to use the facilities."

In Section 1 you were reminded of the benefits sought by those using leisure. If the customer's expectations are to be met, the facilities and equipment must be operated to an agreed operational plan which seeks to achieve high standards of service.

List below five unsatisfactory aspects you have observed at leisure facilities, or might possibly find, which can affect customer service or satisfaction.

To take a swimming pool as an example, problem areas might include:

- overcrowding of the pool, of changing areas, of other ancillary facilities
- lack of comfort and privacy in the changing rooms: cubicles without doors, a wide separation between cubicles and lockers, nowhere to hang towels in the shower area, plastic shower curtains which stick to the user's back, cold floors, wet, slippery floors, inadequate fittings in cubicles and open plan areas, lack of mirrors and hair dryers, inadequate screening, poor baby changing facilities, inadequate facilities for disabled people, lockers not secure.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IN LEISURE

Customers expect the leisure facilities they use to meet the highest of safety standards.

Remember that accidents and tragedies are not just for other people. It is vital that any leisure facility used by the public has tried and tested safety and security procedures, not just for emergencies such as fire and serious accident but also for the day-to-day running of the centre.

A visitor to a leisure facility is often unfamiliar with the surroundings and equipment. It is the responsibility of the management and staff to ensure that everyone is provided with a safe environment whether they be customers, colleagues or contract workers.

The leisure industry is required by law to meet minimum safety standards, which cover the design of buildings, fire and security systems, furnishings and fittings, staff training and equipment. Management and staff can be legally liable for failing in their duty.

Any visitor to a leisure facility will be influenced by the apparent levels of safety and hygiene. In the space below, list some possible signs that standards are low.

Your list may have included the following:

- Limited number of staff on view.
- Untidy and harassed staff.
- Dirty changing rooms and toilets.
- Damaged equipment.
- Untidy entrance foyer.
- Blocked fire exits.
- Dirty or damaged pool surrounds.
- Tables not cleared.
- Un-emptied litter bins.
- Poor security.

Now list five possible incidents affecting the safety of an individual that could occur in a leisure facility with both a gymnasium and a swimming pool, if safety standards were low.

Your answer could have included the following:

- Drowning due to inadequate supervision of pool areas.
- Death by fire because of inadequate fire evacuation procedures.
- Broken arm as a result of slipping on a wet floor.
- Pulled muscles due to lack of tuition, or incorrect use of gym equipment.
- Injury to a member of staff as a result of mis-use of pool chemicals.

Assume you were running a safety training session for your staff. Note below what replies you would expect to the question:

- *What can happen if safety standards drop?*

The consequences of a drop in safety standards might include:

- serious injuries and drownings
- customers stop coming
- bad publicity
- fines or imprisonment
- loss of jobs
- reputation of establishment suffers
- establishment forced to close
- expensive battles in court.

As manager of a leisure facility, you should continually remind yourself and your staff of these consequences. Any one of them can have a profound effect on the business for which you work, and on jobs.

Leisure facilities, as with any other establishment open to the public, have to comply with various legal requirements to maintain public safety.

Make a list below – without looking at the opposite page! – of the laws and official guidelines which exist to help ensure the safe running of a leisure facility.

LEGISLATION

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

- The Act lays down clear duties on everyone at work including non-employees. The main responsibility is with the employer 'to ensure so far as is reasonably practical, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his (or her) employees' (Section 2).
- Employers must also make sure that persons not in their employment are not put in danger (Section 3) – this includes all users of leisure facilities.

Occupier's Liability Act 1974

- States 'the common duty of care' as a statutory duty. It is important for leisure centre managers because it recognises children need more care than adults.

The Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations (1981)

- Employers must provide first aid provision which is likely to be required for foreseeable types of injury or illness resulting from likely accidents.
- These regulations apply only to the provision of first aid for employees. However, employers should ensure that first aid provision also caters adequately for the users of leisure facilities.

Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (1985)

- Those in charge of leisure facilities must report to the relevant enforcing authority for health and safety legislation, certain injuries and dangerous occurrences.

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (1988)

- Employers must assess the consequences which arise from exposure to potentially hazardous substances.
- Employers must introduce and maintain such measures as are necessary to prevent and control the risks.
- Staff must be informed and instructed about the risks and trained to take the required precautions. This is particularly important in relation to the use of chemicals in swimming pools.

The Fire Precautions Act (1971)

- It is unlawful for owners or occupiers of buildings to carry on in business unless they hold a fire certificate-issued by the local fire officer.
- This places a limit on the number of people who can use the premises at any one time and in addition covers the provision of: fire warning systems, including notices to all customers, guests and staff, fire fighting equipment, escape routes and regular staff training in fire procedures.

The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (1988)

- Any sound recording used outside the home, and either broadcast, or publicly performed, must have a licence.

GUIDELINES

Safety in Swimming Pools, 1988

- A comprehensive guide which represents a code of practice – published by the Sports Council in conjunction with the Health and Safety Commission.

Guide to Fire Precautions in Existing Places of Entertainment and Like Places, 1990

- An up-to-date guide produced by the Home Office and published by HMSO.

For more details of health and safety legislation see *Mastercraft 2: Health, Hygiene and Safety in the Hotel and Catering Industry*, Macmillan Education/HCTC, 1990.

All health and leisure clubs need to make sure that they have taken out the necessary insurance cover. This should include employer's liability, public liability, premises, property and income.

One very important consideration to ensure user safety is that there are clearly documented and practised procedures for every foreseeable type of emergency that might occur in your leisure facility. These procedures will promote the safety of all users and minimise risks.

Consider an establishment with a wide range of leisure facilities, including squash courts and swimming pool. Make a list of the different types of emergency that might occur that would particularly require documented procedures.

Documented and practised emergency procedures should include those for:

BUILDING EMERGENCIES

- Fire/smoke
- Gas emission
- Bomb threat
- Structural/lighting failure
- Chemical accident
- Evacuation

CUSTOMER EMERGENCIES

- First aid
- Water rescue
- Assault
- Theft.

These procedures should be made in conjunction with the appropriate safety officer.

It is essential that all staff are trained in carrying out safety procedures and that they remain familiar with their role.

- All emergency procedures must be practised on a regular basis.
- All safety and fire equipment must be regularly tested.
- First aid boxes and resuscitator gas bottles must be checked daily.
- All incidents, rescues and injuries must be recorded in a log book.

Visit any indoor leisure facility of your choice and write a report below of how it seems to stand in relation to each of the points indicated.

Report of visit to: *Date:*

Ease of access (including disabled access)

First impressions of the general cleanliness of the building

How well exits are marked and whether they are obstructed

First impressions of staff. Are they clearly visible, well positioned, alert, smart and helpful?

Safety equipment available

Safety notices giving information concerning potential risks

Cleanliness of changing facilities and toilets

Does this facility appear to have high standards of health and safety? If not why not?

WRITTEN OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

Clearly worded operational procedures and systems must be formulated, written down and followed.

Written information and procedures about every important aspect of operating the leisure facilities will ensure their efficiency and safety.

The amount of detail which is needed in the procedures will vary greatly according to the types of leisure facility and customers, how complicated the arrangements are, whether there is a lot of sophisticated equipment and on the number of different types of activity.

It is advisable to seek experienced advice on any matters of uncertainty.

Written operational procedures and systems for each facility should cover:

GENERAL OPERATIONS (all leisure facilities)

- Formal rules and regulations governing use (for members and/or hotel guests and visitors).
- Details of alarm systems, emergency equipment and emergency procedures.
- Security checklist.
- Marketing and promotional systems.
- Financial and audit systems.
- Complaints/suggestions procedure.
- Loss/theft procedures.

SPECIFIC FACILITIES

Each facility will generate its own operational systems.

- Basic details of each facility – including normal layout and types of equipment used and their correct position.
- Specific operational procedures for each facility.
- Use by the public – safety education, controlling access, restrictions, maximum number of users, and so forth.
- Potential risk factors to users.
- First aid supplies and training.
- Alarm systems, emergency equipment and emergency procedures.
- Maintenance arrangements.
- Cleaning requirements.
- Conditions of hire and use.
- Application of any membership system.
- Pricing and special offers.
- Programming and range of activities.
- Management and supervisory systems.
- Staffing requirements
  - numbers and supervision
  - work rotation (if applicable)
  - maximum work times
  - qualifications
  - training.

Using the headings below, note down the most important points you would include in an operational checklist for the new leisure facility (facilities) at your establishment.

1. POTENTIAL RISKS AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

2. STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

3. MAINTENANCE/CLEANING

4. USE BY GUESTS, MEMBERS, OR THE PUBLIC (information and control)

5. ESSENTIAL RULES

SPECIFIC OPERATIONAL CHECKLISTS

The following guideline procedures cover the more common facilities to be found in a leisure centre.

SWIMMING POOLS

1. POTENTIAL RISKS AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

- Staff must be trained to respond effectively to any emergency situation in their pool.
- The most likely incidents are going to involve individuals who run into difficulties whilst out of their depth, so requiring rescue.
- First aid procedures are therefore essential particularly if resuscitation is required.
- If supervision is not provided, there must be a poolside alarm or telephone to summon help in an emergency.
- Rescue equipment must be available by the poolside and clearly identifiable.
- A member of staff should be designated as 'on call' to deal with any emergency.
- Wet pool surrounds are also potentially lethal areas, broken limbs and cut heads can be commonplace if proper precautions are not taken.
- When not in use, the pool should be satisfactorily secure from unauthorised use.

2. STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

- All pools require some measure of supervision to promote safety.
- Constant poolside supervision by life-guards provides the best assurance of pool user's safety.
- In some cases supervision may not be deemed practical. Pool operators should consider all circumstances: the nature of the pool, pool users, and activities in the pool at any particular time.
- Staff must be adequately and regularly trained and tested for all swimming pool duties.
- Life-guards should possess a valid Royal Life-Saving Society Bronze medallion as a minimum qualification.

3. MAINTENANCE/CLEANING

- Pool water tests must be carried out regularly through each day.
- Regular and correct maintenance of pool buildings, plant and electrical equipment is vital in ensuring the safety and health of pool users and employees.
- Intervals and arrangements for inspection, and for periodic thorough examination of the pool and equipment must be clearly agreed. Manufacturers specifications may assist in this process.
- All inlets and outlets should be thoroughly and regularly checked to ensure there is no risk of swimmers being trapped or injured.
- The competence or qualifications required for those carrying out the work must also be agreed. Records must be kept of all inspections and work.
- The pool surrounds and changing areas must be kept clean at all times for hygiene.
- Duties for pool staff should include the removal of any surface debris, cleaning of the scum line and pool bottom.

4. USE BY GUESTS, MEMBERS, OR THE PUBLIC

- Shallow and deep water must be clearly indicated by signs.
- Pool rules and risks must be clearly displayed.
- A limit on the maximum number of users must be set.

5. ESSENTIAL RULES

- No unaccompanied children.
- No unruly behaviour – ducking, running, fighting and so forth.
- No facemasks or snorkels.
- Swimming costumes must be worn.
- Consider a 'no swimming alone' rule if pool is unsupervised.

All swimming pool operators should consult *Safety in Swimming Pools*, prepared jointly by the Health and Safety Commission and the Sports Council, and available from:

The Publications Department, The Sports Council, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H OQP, Tel: 071-388 1277

quote ISBN 0 906577 83 7.

Read unit 49 of Mastercraft 2: Health, Hygiene and Safety in the Hotel and Catering Industry.

FITNESS SUITE/GYMNASIUM

1. POTENTIAL RISKS AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

- The most likely types of emergency or accident to occur in a gymnasium are heart attack, torn or strained muscles or fatigue due to over exercise.
- All staff on supervisory duty must therefore know the correct procedure when dealing with these incidents.
- If the gymnasium is unsupervised there must be an easily accessible alarm bell to attract staff attention.

2. STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

- If the facility is unsupervised it is essential that there are clear diagrams to indicate how each piece of equipment should be used and any precautions that should be taken.
- The most well-run gyms are those which offer constant supervision and instruction. The greater the supervision, the less likely the chance of injury.
- All staff should be trained in how to use and supervise fitness equipment, and a number of organisations offer specific training and qualifications.

3. MAINTENANCE/CLEANING

- All equipment must be inspected daily.
- Any deficiencies in apparatus, mats, floor surfaces, rigs, equipment and so forth, must be reported in writing to the supervisor.
- All equipment must be regularly serviced.

4. USE BY GUESTS, MEMBERS, OR THE PUBLIC

- All users must be advised of health considerations to ensure it is safe for them to use equipment.
- Ideally users should be shown how to use all equipment by a qualified supervisor.
- A limit on the number of users allowed into the gymnasium at any one time should be made.

5. ESSENTIAL RULES

- Users must wear shirts and vests at all times.
- Sports footwear must be worn at all times.
- Users should be at least 16 years or over.

STEAM ROOMS AND SAUNAS

1. POTENTIAL RISKS AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

- The greatest risk to the public is heat exhaustion, which may precipitate a heart attack.
- These facilities should have an easily accessible alarm button in case of emergency.
- Periodic staff checks are important.

2. STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

- These type of facilities are usually unsupervised.
- The inside of each facility should be checked on a regular basis.
- Staff should be trained in resuscitation and first aid.

3. MAINTENANCE/CLEANING

- Timer and thermostat must be monitored.
- Sauna stove element and stones must be checked periodically during the day.
- Seating must be checked daily to make sure it is secure, that there are no splinters, loose tiles and so forth.
- All warning and information lights must be checked daily.
- Doors must be checked on a regular basis for ease of opening.
- Both saunas and steam rooms must be cleaned regularly in relation to use.

4. USE BY GUESTS, MEMBERS, OR THE PUBLIC

Advice should be given regarding health considerations, and you may adopt rules to exclude use by those:

- six months or more pregnant
- suffering from certain skin complaints
- suffering from circulatory disorders such as stroke, angina, heart disease or high blood pressure
- epileptic or prone to dizziness or blackouts.

5. ESSENTIAL RULES

- Users should not alter any dials or thermostats unless advised to do so.
- Guidelines for the use of these facilities must be observed.

SUNBEDS

1. POTENTIAL RISKS AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

- Exposure to ultra-violet radiation can make an individual more susceptible to malignant melanomas, a type of skin cancer.
- Machines should have an alarm button for emergencies.

2. STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

- Sunbeds are usually unsupervised.
- A member of staff must be on call in case of emergency at all times.
- Part of the service may involve cleaning the bed for the client on arrival, and providing a drinks service.

3. MAINTENANCE/CLEANING

- Sunbeds should be checked regularly to ensure the timer is accurate, no tubes are out and that the motorised canopy lift is working.
- Beds should be wiped clean after each and every use – supplies of cleaning materials must be constantly monitored.

4. USE BY GUESTS, MEMBERS, OR THE PUBLIC

- Disclaimer forms should be considered for signature by new users.
- All new users must be shown how to use the sunbed and the precautions to be taken.
- Each user should be issued with goggles before each session.

5. ESSENTIAL RULES

- No more than one session every 24 hours.

SPAS AND JACUZZIS

1. POTENTIAL RISKS AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

- Most likely incidents are heart attacks, heat exhaustion and drowning.
- An alarm button must be on hand for emergencies.

2. STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

- Normally unsupervised, but must be checked on a regular basis.
- Staff must be trained in first aid and resuscitation.

3. MAINTENANCE/CLEANING

- Filtration methods and chemicals are similar to those used for swimming pools.
- Due to high concentrations of body oils, skin debris and organic wastes, cleaning and filtration needs to be very thorough.
- As water is kept at high pressures, the water evaporates relatively quickly and so constantly needs to be topped up.

4. USE BY GUESTS, MEMBERS, OR THE PUBLIC

- Use should be kept to short periods due to the high temperatures.
- Those suffering from heart conditions or high blood pressure should avoid use.

CHANGING FACILITIES

1. POTENTIAL RISKS

- The most likely incidents to occur in changing facilities are theft and assault.

2. STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

- Private club facilities are usually unsupervised.
- A member of staff must be available for queries.
- Changing rooms should be patrolled on a regular basis not only for security reasons but also to monitor cleaning levels.

3. CLEANING/MAINTENANCE

- Changing rooms must be cleaned on a regular basis and in particular after peak times.
- All lockers should be checked regularly so that door locks are working and that there are no sharp edges.
- All cubicles should be checked daily to ensure doors lock, seats are secure and that there are no sharp edges or splinters.

4. USE BY GUESTS, MEMBERS, OR THE PUBLIC

- Use the toilet before activity, especially before swimming.
- Ensure no valuables are left unattended.
- Use storage lockers if provided.
- Display essential notices regarding safety in changing room.

STAFF SKILLS AND TRAINING NEEDED TO RUN LEISURE FACILITIES

Good staff are essential for the success of any leisure centre. Consider some of the tasks that may need to be performed at a leisure centre. Most depend on the skills and ability of staff, even those which might be done by machine are only as good as the human operator:

- providing a welcome
- processing a new membership
- providing information about the centre
- assessing fitness levels
- booking the facilities
- keeping records of usage
- instruction on gymnasium equipment
- resuscitating an unconscious swimmer
- teaching aerobics
- providing a drink in the refreshment area
- cleaning the pool surround and changing room.

List below some of the essential requirements or valuable skills that you would look for in a member of staff working in a leisure centre.

The following are likely to be considered essential or valuable assets for a member of staff working in leisure facilities:

- In good health, with good hearing and sight so as to comply with all safety requirements.
- Staff employed in active wet or dry areas should have natural hand-eye co-ordination and have a sound practical knowledge of a wide variety of sports and recreational activities.
- Special knowledge and skills suited to specific facilities – for example, an understanding of the mechanics and fitness of the body and an appreciation of dietary principles would be necessary to provide sound advice in any gymnasium.
- A basic knowledge of first aid and, advantageously, a recognised first aid qualification.
- Good interpersonal skills so as to relate to a wide range of individual customers.
- Good personal presentation, both in terms of standards of dress and grooming, and in verbal communication.
- Operational experience of some leisure facilities or practical knowledge of organising and presenting leisure activities.

Imagine that you have just taken on a new receptionist for your leisure establishment. Make a checklist below of the areas you might wish to talk to him or her about.

Background knowledge of the establishment
Roles and requirements of a receptionist
Product knowledge: prices, goods, services
Membership joining procedures
Responsibility to the public and other employees
First aid
Membership filing system
Methods of payment: cash/credit card/cheque
Operation of reception equipment
Duties related to locker keys and towel issue
Terms and conditions of employment
Layout of the building
Staffing structure
Market sector
Membership categories
Health and safety at work
Accident and fire procedures
Lost property
Membership rules
Message taking
Selling techniques
Uniform
Welfare arrangements
Security

Principles and practice of health and fitness, exercise methods, nutrition, benefits of (as appropriate) beauty treatments, saunas, steam therapies, sunbeds, and possible problems associated with misuse

Decisions on how to supervise particular activities and areas in a leisure centre are not always straightforward. To place a member, or members of staff in charge of each particular area may be very desirable, but at the same time may create operational difficulties. Note for each of the following some reasons for and against constant staff supervision:

	REASONS:	
	FOR	*AGAINST*
Reception		
Swimming pool		
Gymnasium		
Squash court		
Sauna		
Solarium		
Changing facilities/ toilets		

You may have identified many of the following:

	REASONS FOR	AGAINST
Reception	Ensures a personal welcome and allows a focal point for queries and information. Also provides a control of access to the leisure facilities	May not be very busy at off-peak times. Receptionist could therefore be involved with club administration
Swimming pool	Reduces risk of drownings, or other potential incidents	Continual supervision requires adequate staffing levels, and suitable qualified staff
Gymnasium	Controls access and ensures correct use of equipment	At off-peak periods, staff time will be under-utilised
Squash court	Ensures correct and safe use of courts. Can offer basic instruction	Constant supervision not necessary
Sauna	Ensures correct and safe use of facilities	Constant supervision not necessary
Solarium	Enables queries to be answered and people to be shown how to use the facility	Constant supervision not necessary
Changing facilities/ toilets	A member of staff on continual duty will increase security and ensure high standards of cleanliness are maintained	Constant supervision not necessary

It can be seen that many of the facilities such as the sauna, solaria and squash court need little specific supervision. Other facilities such as the swimming pool or gymnasium may only need supervision at peak times. It may be that one member of staff is appropriate to provide a general level of control and supervision for a range of facilities, and to provide advice and assistance as and when necessary.

Many hotels have unsupervised pools and fitness gymnasia. Others staff a reception desk and have at least one other appropriately trained member of staff to regularly patrol all areas of the complex and assist in instruction, cleaning and maintenance of the facilities.

The decision regarding staff supervision, especially of pools, should be carefully considered in the context of the known risks. There are also clear indications that successful generation of income from fitness suites can be directly related to the employment of trained, enthusiastic staff.

Checklist of essential or valuable qualifications

Swimming pool staff

- Royal Life Saving Society:
  - Bronze Medallion
  - Pool Bronze
  - Award of Merit
- First Aid Certificate
- Swimming Teachers Certificate
- Pool Plant Operators Certificate

Fitness suite/gynasium staff

The London Central YMCA offers supervisory courses for:

- the teaching of exercise to music
- fitness training
- ante/post natal exercise
- exercise for the over 50s.

These courses are approved by the Sports Council in association with the Royal Society of Arts.

The National Amateur Body Building Association also offers courses and qualifications in weight training and instruction.

The Finnish Sauna Diploma is specially designed for use in leisure centres. It incorporates the Sports Massage Certificate and the operation of and maintenance of saunas, steam baths and gymnasium apparatus, as well as ultra-violet lamps.

Coaching and teaching certificates are also issued by most sporting bodies. These include: squash, badminton, basketball and volleyball.

Producing sound operational procedures and trained staff are vital elements in setting high standards of leisure service.

Imagine that you are the new manager of the Haven Sports and Leisure Centre as you read the case study overleaf. Use page 66 to make some notes on where your priorities would lie.

Case Study: The Haven Sports and Leisure Centre

The Haven Hotel at Sandbanks, Poole, is in an idyllic location, right at the edge of the sea, overlooking Brownsea Island and the Purbeck Hills.

Before the leisure centre was added, with its unusual linked outdoor and indoor swimming pools, The Haven was under-utilised and going downhill. Other improvements included gutting and refitting the kitchen, complete redecoration of the hotel including the magnificent sun lounge, installation of satellite television and the addition of a small conference centre.

Use of the leisure centre is free for hotel guests, with the exception of the squash court and sunbeds. Club membership entitles local residents to full use of all the hotel's facilities. Members tend to be aged 40 years and over: Sandbanks is a very expensive residential area, and the club is regarded as 'up-market'. Many of the hotel guests are a similar age. Children are allowed to use the club facilities, but not after 5 pm.

The indoor pool is heated to 29 degrees Celsius, and the outdoor pool, which is also kept open throughout the year, to 26 degrees. At night time the outdoor pool is covered with a thermal cover: this has to be replaced each year as it rots with the sun and chlorine. There were plans to put a dome over the pool, but the majority of members said they preferred it to remain open air. Other facilities include a glass-backed squash court, spa pools, gymnasium, solarium, sauna, steam room and leisure centre bar (for soft drinks, although it does have a liquor licence). The attractive spa pools feature a rain shower and jet stream; when the centre is quiet, two of the pools can be switched off to conserve heat.

The centre originally included a games room, but this was not particularly popular so the (hired) equipment was returned and the space used to double the size of the gym. The squash court is under-used by members. Squash leagues were tried, but only ten players joined up. The court is now also used for aerobics, yoga, circuit and internal training and racquetball.

Use of the sunbeds was free, but people abused the facility, booking in advance and then not turning up. The small size and location of the changing rooms is a problem: after using the pool, swimmers have to go downstairs and through the gym area. In spite of 'non-slip' mats the floor surfaces become slippery and there have been one or two falls.

When the games room was in operation, people would bring drinks with them from the hotel bar: they were affronted when staff reminded them that glasses were not allowed in the leisure centre. On one famous occasion two hotel guests in full evening dress had to be quickly removed from the running machine.

There is an exchange system with the hotel housekeeper for towels, 30 at a time. The loss of towels from the hotel is high, with many ending up in the linen baskets of the leisure centre.

People are not allowed to use the weights room unsupervised, unless they are known to be competent by the staff. The previous manager screened new members by asking the following questions:

- *When did you last participate in any sports?*
- *What do you hope to achieve?*
- *How often could you commit yourself to attending the centre?*
- *Are you suffering from, or recently suffered from any medical problems?*
- *Are you under medication, or recently completed a course of medication?*
- *Do you know of any reason why you should not use the equipment?*
- *Do you smoke, or drink alcohol?*
- *Is your job stressful?*
- *What type of life-style do you lead?*

The screening process also includes a fitness test and the person's blood pressure is taken. If the manager was not happy with any aspect of the application, a letter was requested from the person's doctor to confirm that he or she is fit enough to participate.

There is a waiting list for membership. The names of members who renew their membership promptly goes into a draw: the winner gets free membership for the next year.

The centre is run as a completely separate unit from the hotel. The manager is responsible for weekly VAT returns and stock checks. There is a fair amount of paperwork involved in the job as well as responsibility for the plant. Under the manager are seven full-time staff working a shift system. All have first aid training and the Bronze Medallion for Life Saving. They are encouraged to go on other training courses and their certificates are displayed on the walls, however they must pay for this training themselves.

The leisure centre is deemed to be a success. It has helped generate business for the hotel, the conference market has improved and the hotel is trying to develop its short breaks market. But competition in the area is increasing, with other hotels adding leisure facilities. The hotel's owners were keen to sell a range of swimwear from the leisure centre, but the idea met with resistance from the swimwear shop in Sandbanks.

These were the areas which the new manager himself suggested:

Staffing

- Examine staff turnover and investigate any reasons for staff dissatisfaction, or low motivation.
- Review the staff rota to ensure optimum cover is provided, and that staff holidays can be fitted in at periods which suits the individuals concerned and the leisure centre.
- Consider taking on Employment/Youth trainees, providing them with suitable on and off-job training with a view to becoming full-time employees. Discuss with HCTC whether Caterbase can be introduced.
- Negotiate an annual training budget with the hotel on the basis of a training plan for leisure centre staff, including customer care skills.

Cost control

- Review cleaning and maintenance schedules, including long-term maintenance work.
- Explore how energy costs can be reduced.
- Review ordering procedures for cleaning materials, chemicals, bar stocks and so forth.
- Investigate towel control procedure.

Facilities

- Review use of squash court.
- Investigate re-location of changing rooms, if possible with more space. If re-location is not possible, how can the floor surface be made safer?
- Carry out an audit of operating and safety procedures.
- Review screening test for new members.

Services to members/hotel guests

- Examine existing records to establish profitability of centre, trends in membership, proportion of hotel guests who use centre, how important the centre is in choice of the hotel for holidays/ conferences, take-up of particular facilities in the centre by members/hotel guests.
- Carry out a survey of members and hotel guests to establish their views of the services and facilities provided: initially by speaking to users at appropriate times, then with a mini-questionnaire linked to a prize.
- As part of this review decide whether to pursue the plans to sell swimwear at the centre. Could it carry the centre's logo?
- Review membership fees, and charges for additional facilities such as sunbeds. Would off-peak membership work, and how could it be controlled?
- Visit other hotel and leisure establishments in the area, to establish what facilities they are offering, and plan to offer, who uses them, what charges are made.
- To consider what the membership situation will be when existing members become too old to use the facilities: how is the local population changing? What visitors are likely to be attracted to Sandbanks in the future?
- Consider providing snacks and a wider range of drinks from the leisure centre bar.

To increase the enjoyment of all customers, it is also important to encourage good practice in the use of facilities. The manager in the previous case study might have added to his list plans to draw up a framework of good practice and etiquette. Developed with the co-operation of his staff, members of the leisure centre and hotel guests, such a framework would reduce the chance of a re-occurrence of the various problems which had been experienced (bookings for sunbeds not taken up, taking drinking glasses into the leisure centre).

The following example demonstrates how a framework can be applied.

Golf course etiquette

- All players must wear appropriate golfing clothes, including rubber soled shoes or spikes.
- Before play the local rules for the course must be read.
- Each player must have his or her own golf bag.
- Practise swings should be avoided on the tees so minimising damage.
- Players should refrain from talking or moving when another is playing a stroke.
- Playing without delay and waiting until the players in front are out of reach combines safety with courtesy.
- Single players should always give way to matches.
- A full round match must give way to a half round match.
- Allow the following match to pass if one hole or more is lost on the preceding players.
- If searching for a lost ball, signal the match behind to play through.
- Any damage to the fairway, bunkers or greens must be repaired immediately.
- Golf carts and bags must be kept off the tees and greens.

The next section looks in more detail at the provision of services and facilities which will satisfy the leisure customer.

SECTION 4

Satisfying the leisure customer

After completing this section you will be able to:

- outline the factors which should be considered in pricing leisure facilities
- explain the role of membership schemes and what is involved in their implementation
- plan the programming of leisure facilities
- recommend the provision of appropriate specialist services to enhance the customers' leisure experience
- monitor and evaluate a leisure operation.

The Leisure Operation has taken you through five decision-making stages:

- the type of leisure provision to be made
- the development plan to be followed
- the mix of specific facilities to be incorporated
- the general theme and image to be adopted
- the management and operational procedures necessary for leisure facilities.

The whole process of planning leisure facilities, and in particular the preparation of an operational plan, must be geared to satisfying the customer, the theme of this section. You start by looking at the pricing framework and the organisation of membership and booking systems.

FACILITIES AND COSTS

The cost of providing leisure services is determined in the main by three factors.

Fixed costs These include such things as land, buildings and equipment. For example, when money is borrowed to build and equip a new leisure centre, the interest charge on the borrowing is fixed whether the leisure centre is open or shut.

Operating costs These are more variable. For example, staff will only be paid for hours worked when the leisure centre is open.

Utilisation or occupancy An important factor in costing leisure services. For example, the cost of heating a swimming pool will be the same whether there are 2 people in it or 200. The interest charge on the money borrowed to build a holiday centre will be the same whether the centre is open for 6 months of the year or 12.

Therefore the fees charged to customers for the use of golf courses and squash courts are generally high. The space is expensive to buy, develop and maintain, and it can only be used by a limited number of customers at any one time. Compare two squash courts (each of which is a large enclosed volume used by only two people at a time) with a disco nightclub (twice the size of the two courts and their changing rooms) which is crowded with people dancing and drinking high profit-margin drinks. The latter is bigger but represents a very efficient use of space, especially if it can be used every night and the room used for other activities in the day time.

Some leisure activities involve the provision of costly equipment and are expensive both to maintain and to operate: think for example of the equipment provided at an ice-rink or a ten-pin bowling alley, and compare this with that provided for an aerobics session.

SETTING THE PRICE

'Price' is the only element in your marketing effort that directly produces the revenue which is needed to cover the costs of developing and operating your facilities.

The traditional method of setting leisure prices is to total all the costs and add something for profit, or agree an acceptable deficit, so giving the selling price.

To be successful, the pricing of a leisure service must also reflect the 'product' – whether the activity is new and in vogue, has matured or is in decline – and its intended position in the market-place. Demand is the vital element. If the facility is wrongly sited or poor, the facts that the activity itself is in high demand and there is no competition to speak of, may be irrelevant.

It is possible to pay as little as £12 a year for membership of a publicly-run fitness centre, or over £1000 for membership of a luxury health club. The price may reinforce the quality, exclusivity or other aspects of the service. The price should also reflect the market position of the facility, and what competitors are charging. Most customers want value for money. Often they are fully prepared to pay for this if they get a quality service. (If you have already worked through *The Leisure Experience*, you will recall the exercises which compared value for money of various leisure activities and holidays with what your own establishment offers.)

Here are some other important points to consider when pricing leisure facilities:

- If a certain facility is not used, for example a sunbed, that income cannot be regained. This means that special offers for off-peak times and last minute deals are common.
- Another problem with many leisure services is that a customer does not leave with her or his 'wrapped' leisure experience. It is sometimes difficult for customers to anticipate and immediately value what they are getting for their money. This is particularly so for first time customers. So often the level of service delivered has to be adjusted to meet customer expectations and their ability to pay.

Your establishment has just opened a new leisure facility which includes a swimming pool, Jacuzzi and a fitness suite. Bearing in mind different target groups and the different facilities available note below some different possibilities for pricing these facilities, for instance a special mid-morning swimming rate.

The possibilities may include:

- a different price for each facility:
  - adult
  - child
  - student
- cheap rate for:
  - the elderly
  - women with toddlers
- reduced entry price for the use of 2 or perhaps 3 facilities
- special off-peak reductions.

PRICING STRATEGY

A number of pricing strategies can be adopted for leisure facilities. There may not be one single price, but a pricing structure influenced by, for example:

- the different activities in a leisure centre
- according to the customer, that is student/child/adult/guest/member
- different times of the day or week
- the going rate of competitors.

If it is decided to set prices high, the benefits should suggest it is value for money. Let the customers judge for themselves, and be prepared to meet their expectations. Customers vote very quickly with their feet in the leisure business.

When presenting the price to the customer do not just quote a bald price. Sandwich the price between benefits – for example:

'The Elite Membership of this health club is £250 per year. This means you have no more to pay for classes and it includes free use of sunbeds and sauna. Is less than £5 per week such a high price to pay to become fitter and healthier?'

For most leisure facilities, a flexible, multi-tiered pricing system, that is sensitive to the leisure customer's needs, is the best option.

ENTRANCE FEES

With facilities which welcome members, there is an option to charge those members a separate entrance fee each time they make use of the facilities.

- Private health clubs that have charged entrance fees, have found it can be counter productive. Members like to belong and freedom of access is an important part of belonging.
- Members do not like having to pay regular payments in addition to annual membership.
- Most clubs receive a subscription as an upfront payment. Some clubs associate an entrance fee with being 'down market'.

An entrance fee system can sometimes be helpful in attracting non-members and can assist in generating new membership. Any leisure operation contemplating this option should consider the effect it will have on existing members – in some circumstances it will remove the feeling of exclusivity.

MEMBERSHIP SCHEMES

Membership schemes are very often an important part of operating leisure facilities. Of the many health and fitness clubs which have developed in recent years, the majority base their operations on membership schemes. Hotels that have developed health and fitness facilities, often in conjunction with swimming pools, have found it makes good business sense to use a membership scheme as a means of attracting non-hotel guests to use the leisure facilities.

Read the case study overleaf. You will be asked to comment on the problems which might by encountered in meeting the needs and expectations of the Club's users.

Case Study: The Dormy Leisure Club

The Dormy Leisure Club is a purpose-built complex forming part of the four-star Dormy Hotel at Ferndown, on the outskirts of Bournemouth. The hotel, which has an excellent reputation for its conference facilities, is situated in 12 acres of beautifully landscaped gardens, adjacent to Ferndown Golf Course.

Owners, De Vere Hotels, approved the development of the leisure complex on the basis of the extra attraction it provided conference-users. The Club is open from 7.30 am to 11 pm, 7 days a week, to both hotel guests and members. There are 1000 private members, and a waiting list of potential members. The emphasis is on 'leisure''rather than 'sports'. Guests and members may relax and enjoy the surroundings with the option to exercise, swim or join in a sport of their choice.

Facilities include a large swimming pool, Jacuzzi, 8 station multi-gym and other exercise equipment, 2 squash courts, an outside tennis court and putting green, sunbeds and saunas. Classes are available in keep fit, yoga, swimming and aqua-aerobics. A nominal charge is made to cover the cost of the tutor.

The food and beverage operation includes a 50-cover restaurant, offering snacks and light meals from 10 am to 10 pm, and an à la carte menu during the lunch time and evening meal periods. The bar is open from 10.30 am to 10.30 pm, when guests and members are able to relax in comfort and enjoy the quiet, intimate atmosphere. A strict requirement within the Club premises is the use of high-quality plastic glasses for the safety of swimmers and those walking around without shoes.

Snacks and drinks are also served at tables around the poolside. A vigilant eye has to be maintained to prevent any food or debris falling into the water. In good weather food and drinks service is extended to the large outside sun terrace, and barbecue/disco evenings are a feature on Friday nights.

Members' Evenings are held regularly with entertainment, special menus and themes. Parties for members' children are also a regular event.

A clause in the rules allows closure of the complex to Club members for a maximum of 21 days in any year for private functions. Generally it is not necessary to close the complex for the whole day, but quite often special feature evenings form part of a conference programme, for example a Caribbean evening with barbecue, steel band and limbo dancers, and the complex is closed for other uses from 6 pm.

Use of the leisure club tends to be unpredictable. Large conferences usually mean it is busy, holiday weekends and the summer months are also busy, with large numbers of guests with children on weekend leisure breaks.

Now comment in the space below on what problems might by encountered in meeting the needs and expectations of the users of the Dormy Leisure Club.

How does your list compare with the problems which the management and senior staff of the Dormy Leisure Club have themselves recognised?

- The leisure complex can become very crowded, for instance when a large conference coincides with a popular time for members.
- Club members, who pay expensive fees, may resent children being in the pool when they want to use it.
- Although the Club rules permit its closure to members for up to 21 days a year, members are very sensitive when their pleasure gets second priority to other users.
- Guests whose room rate includes use of the leisure centre may resent members monopolising facilities.
- The hotel guest on a 'one-off' visit may not have the same feeling of 'belonging' as a member, and therefore not such high standards of cleanliness and tidiness.
- The car park may be overcrowded with an influx of conference delegates, so preventing Club members from finding parking spaces.

If the management of your establishment were contemplating introducing a membership scheme, what considerations would have to be taken into account? Note your thoughts below. If your establishment already has a membership scheme, use this exercise to summarise the considerations that were/should have been taken into account at the time it was introduced.

Before implementing a membership scheme, it is essential to evaluate its purpose.

- Is it a means of attracting particular market segments? Or is it the benefits of belonging and identifying with the organisation that are important?
- Is membership being used for reasons of control over entry? Or is it a way of obtaining market segment information?
- Is the purpose of membership financial and related to generating an early cash flow, increasing income or providing a stable source of income?
- What is the cost of implementing a membership scheme? What percentage of income is lost through administration?
- Could there be a conflict between users, for example, between hotel guest users and local members?

Checklist for establishing a membership scheme

1. What objectives do you have:
   - social
   - financial?
2. How will the scheme be promoted?
3. How can the membership scheme be used as a management tool:
   - providing information on users
   - targeting promotions more accurately
   - supplying the basis for financial estimates?
4. How will you set up a membership database, and keep it up-to-date, dealing with renewals and lapsed members?
5. What membership categories will you have:
   - type, time, price?
6. What operating procedures will you have for:
   - applications
   - records
   - controls
   - identification
   - payment methods
   - cards?
7. How will you evaluate the benefits to members and club, and introduce improvements and additional benefits?

OPERATING A MEMBERSHIP SCHEME

Selling membership The reception area is the hub of any leisure centre and receptionists are the key to selling membership. They need to be specifically trained in customer care and should have good knowledge of all the activities in the centre.

A prospective member should be taken on a tour of the facilities whenever possible, and the benefits and the operation explained. If at all possible, the enrolment should be undertaken by a member of the management team, so indicating the importance of the transaction.

Membership records These should be updated on a regular basis in regard to payments, renewals, regularity of attendance and facilities used. Keeping records on a computer enables speedy retrieval of information for administrative and marketing purposes.

In the space below design a membership card for a recently opened fitness club, clearly indicating all the information that should be included and what form the card might take.

Depending on the specific requirements and policy of the club, the membership card may take the following form:

- made of a durable material, such as plastic lamination
- be tamper proof
- different colours can be used for each membership category
- details should include:
  - name
  - photograph
  - signature
  - category of membership
  - expiry date

Membership renewal Renewals are more easily undertaken on a rolling basis. This allows a regular dispatch of reminders and enables the regular follow-up of members failing to renew their memberships. On the other hand, a single renewal date for membership can cause considerable pressure when the renewal date arrives. With a suitable program, computers maintain a membership renewal system with little difficulty.

Membership categories These will vary depending on the facilities available and the policy adopted by the operator.

Membership may cover all aspects of the facility, or may just be for individual activities such as squash, fitness gym, weights or swimming. There may be categories for adult, family, junior, OAP or student. The time the facilities are used might also affect the membership category, for instance off peak, peak, weekday and weekend.

Booking The booking of facilities must be made as easy as possible. Bookings can either be made by the individual themselves, for example purchasing a ticket to stick on a sun-bed booking sheet, or they may book directly through reception. This may be done either in person or over the phone.

Whatever the system used, it is essential that all users are fully aware of the procedure to follow. In addition the system must be able to accommodate casual bookings, member's bookings and advanced block bookings for all facilities.

Efficient computerised leisure booking systems are available. These can provide comprehensive information on sales, advance bookings, stock control, facility usage and membership records.

In addition, with the development of increasingly sophisticated point of sales equipment, many tills are able to keep specific note of facility usage in relation to payments made, and the method of payment used, credit card, cheque, cash and so forth.

Visit three different leisure facilities and assess the different types of booking systems in use. Ask yourself if the method used is the most appropriate for that facility and what improvements could be made.

FACILITY/VENUE	*COMMENTS*	*IMPROVEMENTS*
1		
2		
3		

THE PROGRAMMING OF LEISURE FACILITIES

Important stages in leisure programme development, as with many management processes involve:

- setting objectives
- assessing current and potential demand
- planning and implementing the programme
- monitoring, evaluating and modifying the programme.

After opening, it is often advisable to start with an initial experimentation period allowing for casual use, taster courses, coaching sessions, demonstrations and various incentives for each activity in the centre. From here the programme will evolve, responding to customer demand yet requiring planning and control by management.

One of the most important considerations when setting a programme is that time is the basis on which it operates. Managers must establish hourly, daily, weekly and seasonal patterns of use which suit the customer. This will require a balance between the range of potential activities. The manager must also retain some degree of flexibility to respond to immediate needs.

The programming of any leisure facility will greatly depend on the objectives and policy of the operator, and on customer needs. One way which can be efficient in ensuring a balanced programme is to allocate a minimum percentage of programme time for each specific user group.

Depending on the facilities and operating policy the manager may need to take account of:

- casual use
- clubs
- special events
- coaching/instruction
- non-sport use
- school/college use
- members' use
- guests' use

A balance can help ensure maximum use and income.

List alongside each facility mentioned below some of the different possible uses and activities.

Swimming pool

e.g. Swimming lessons

Fitness suite

Aerobics studio

Squash court

Here are some suggestions:

Swimming pool

Scuba-diving	Canoeing
Aqua aerobics	Water polo
Life-saving	Ante-natal groups

Fitness suite

Health screening	Health education
Personal instruction	Fitness testing
Dietary information	

Aerobics studio

Social gatherings	Yoga
Dance classes	Lectures
Crèche	First aid tuition
Indoor bowls	

Squash court

Table tennis	Children's games
Crèche	Skittles
Bouncing castle	

Whatever programme of activities is adopted for a leisure facility, it must not only be flexible but should be changing and dynamic.

The following list offers some useful points to consider when operating a recreation facility programme.

- Allow for some free space in the programme, this will give greater scope for flexibility and change.
- Encourage new ideas and build up a range of different activities for people to try.
- Allow your programme to develop slowly, do not establish an instant programme.
- Sell off-peak times and try package deals.
- Allow people to watch. Activity breeds activity.
- Experiment with different space usage.
- Ensure, if at all possible, that all courses have follow-up courses.
- Experiment with the timing of sessions.

PROGRAMME PLANNING

Suggest below, in outline, how you might plan the use of an 18 m x 9 m rectangular indoor swimming pool. The pool is part of a health and fitness suite at a 70 bedroom hotel which regularly accommodates business seminars for up to 40 people during the week and promotes leisure breaks at the weekend. The hotel also has 350 Leisure Club members from the surrounding area and the membership includes weekend family memberships (children aged 10 to 18 only). Demand for the pool is considerable so some programming is necessary to satisfy various interests.

POOL PROGRAMME OUTLINE

DAY	*MORNING (time.....)*	*AFTERNOON (time).....*
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

A SUGGESTED EXAMPLE OF A POOL PROGRAMME OUTLINE

Pool open 8 am - 10 pm usually plus any special sessions.

Casual swimming for resident guests and members unless stated.

DAY	MORNING (time.....)	AFTERNOON (time).....
Monday	12.00-2.00 lunch time lanes	4.30-5.30 junior lessons
Tuesday	6.30-8.00 early morning swim lunch time lanes	8.30-9.00 aerobics swim
Wednesday	10.30-11.30 over 50s lunch time guests only	8.00-9.00 guests only
Thursday	6.30-8.00 early morning swim lunch time lanes	8.00-9.00 members only
Friday	10.00-11.00 over 50s lanes 10.00-11.00 leisure break guests	2.00-4.00 guests only
Saturday	10.00-12.30 guests only 10.00-11.00 leisure break guests	12.30-2.00 members only
Sunday	8.00-9.00 fitness swim (under instruction)	4.30-6.30 members

There will be innumerable options.

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THE PROVISION OF SPECIALIST SERVICES

One of the most important aspects in running a successful leisure operation is the provision of special services and activities. Those leisure centres which provide such facilities often have a competitive edge over those that do not.

Suggest below any additional services that you might be able to offer to enhance the enjoyment and satisfaction of an individual visiting a leisure facility which has a small swimming pool, fitness gymnasium and café.

Your selection of special services may include:

HEALTH SCREENING

Many modern fitness suites and gymnasiums now offer this service. It ensures that any individual who uses the facilities is generally fit enough to do so.

FITNESS TESTING

This has become very popular in recent years. It usually comprises the use of an exercise bike and a cardiometer which measures heart rate. From the information received after a 5 to 10 minute session on the bike, an individual's aerobic capacity (fitness level) can be measured. An individually-designed fitness course is then compiled so enabling the individual to improve her or his fitness level.

DIET AND HEALTH EDUCATION

In these days of high levels of heart disease and low levels of exercise, health education has become a very important issue. Many leisure facilities now offer the opportunity for customers to learn how to adopt a healthier life-style. Often a small specialist catering outlet is located in a health or leisure suite based on a healthy diet approach.

BEAUTY THERAPY

This is a service which can attract many women and lead to their use of other facilities. All types of different services can be offered to keep the individual looking fit and beautiful. These services range from a manicure to a deep facial cleanse.

MASSAGE

This service can be a successful addition to a health and fitness facility if performed by professionally qualified staff.

PERSONAL TUITION

The personal supervision and tuition of an individual allows the user to get the best out of a facility and ensures the speedy and correct adoption of new skills. This could apply for example to fitness training, swimming or aerobics and dance.

SPORTS INJURY ASSESSMENT

Health and fitness clubs allow specially trained physiotherapists to use their facilities as a sports injury clinic. This service can often have a beneficial effect in generating increased membership from specialist sportsmen and women.

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EVALUATING OPERATIONAL PERFORMANCE

In a nutshell, it is the continuing satisfaction of customers that lies at the heart of a successful leisure operation. While this will reflect in the financial performance of the leisure facilities, any evaluation should look beyond the current performance figures.

For example a growing dissatisfaction or decline in interest among leisure customers might not yet fully reflect in performance statistics, yet when it does it might be too late to take action.

Evaluating the performance of a leisure facility is an ongoing activity, rather like continually holding a hand to take a heart pulse.

Suggest below different information and actions that could be used in evaluating the performance of a leisure operation.

Your list may have included some or all of the following:

- Daily and weekly records of use and income, even including morning, afternoon and evening splits, can be useful.
- Key operational systems can provide helpful guidance, including pool water temperature and analysis records and accident records.
- If a new leisure facility is part of an existing hotel complex, some analysis of changes in revenue and room sales should be undertaken.
- User satisfaction can be monitored by questionnaires, comment cards, a suggestions book and records of complaints.
- Membership numbers, user figures and membership drop-out rates should be constantly monitored.
- Regular staff meetings are also a very important aspect in obtaining valuable information and feedback about performance.
- A now much publicised method of keeping 'close to the customer' is known as 'management by walking about'. This involves the manager getting from behind the desk, or even reception, and personally monitoring all aspects of the leisure operation and talking to customers on a regular basis.
- The perceived success or otherwise of competing or alternative facilities.

Customer questionnaires

Questionnaires are a more formal way of obtaining information, and if used carefully can help you research the views of the customers you don't see, or don't talk to, or who, no matter how carefully you speak, may prefer not to say things you should hear.

Attention must be paid to the questions that are asked to avoid ambiguity, and to ensure that respondents are not led to give particular answers. There are various ways in which information can be sought, including:

- open ended questions, for example: What do you especially like about this leisure centre?
- scales, for example: Please indicate on the scale below whether you agree or disagree with the statement: the staff in this leisure centre are helpful:
  strongly agree ☐☐☐☐☐☐ strongly disagree
- multiple choice questions, for example: Please indicate how you rate the facilities in this leisure centre:
  ☐ excellent ☐ good ☐ average ☐ poor
  or, for example:
  Please tick those of the following statements that apply to you
  This is my:
  ☐ first visit ☐ second visit ☐ regular visitor
  Time of visit:
  ☐ early morning ☐ midday ☐ afternoon ☐ evening
  Reason for visit
  ☐ exercise ☐ relaxation ☐ meet friends
  ☐ meet business colleagues
  ☐ play (name sport) .....

On the page opposite, design a simple questionnaire that could be used to gain information from guests and members using the leisure facilities at your establishment. The object is to assist in assessing your success in satisfying customers.

This ends this self-study unit. You will now have a fuller understanding of the special requirements and priorities in the management of a leisure operation.

Marketing and promotion are dealt with in depth in the companion self-study units: *The Leisure Experience* and *Promoting Leisure*. Further information on more general management principles is given in the following Operational Management modules and self-study units:

in *Personnel Management:*

- *Getting the Right Staff*
- *Staff Retention*
- *Rights and Responsibilities*

in *Supervisory Management:*

- *Task Management*
- *Communications*
- *Leadership and Motivation*

in *Financial Management:*

- *Controlling Costs*
- *Interpreting Financial Results*
- *Making Financial Decisions*

in *Food and Beverage Management:*

- *Food and Beverage Provision*
- *Food and Beverage Production*
- *Food and Beverage Control*

and in *Customer Care Management.*